

Message Text

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SUBJECT: UGTT CONGRESS OPENS

REF: TUNIS 1859

1. SUMMARY: THE GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS OPENED ITS QUADRENNIAL CONGRESS MARCH 24 WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA GIVING INAUGURAL SPEECH. HE DESCRIBED ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE HE BECAME HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT IN 1970 AND HABIB ACHOUR BECAME UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL. NOUIRA NOTED THAT CONTINUED SUCCESS DEPENDS ON UNITY OF ALL ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY AND POINTED TO FIVE-YEAR SOCIAL COMPACT SIGNED IN JANUARY AS THE KEYSTONED TO ACHIEVEMENT OF FIFTH DEVELOPMENT PLAN GOALS. HABIB ACHOUR'S OPENING SPEECH RECOUNTED HISTORY OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE AND ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL GOALS SINCE 1956. HE EMPHASIZED GREATER ROLE PLAYED BY UGTT IN FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GOT POLICY SINCE 1970 AND HAD WARM WORDS OF PRAISE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER. AFL-CIO REPRESENTATIVE IRVING BROWN ALSO SPOKE AT OPENING SESSION, MAKING STRONG DEFENSE OF HUMAN AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD. HIS STATEMENTS WERE APPLAUDED ENTHUSIASTICALLY BY THE

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UGTT CONGRESS DELEGATES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE UGTT'S QUADRENNIAL CONGRESS OPENED MARCH 24 UNDER THE SOLOGAN "FREEDOM AND PROGRES" WITH 800 DELEGATES PRESENT PLUS NUMEROUS FOREIGN VISITORS AND THE ENTIRE TUNISIAN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP (EXCEPT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA). UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL HABIB ACHOUR WELCOMED DELEGATES

AND GUESTS AND GAVE SPEECH RECOUNTING THE UGTT'S ROLE IN RECENT TUNISIAN HISTORY. HE EMPHASIZED THE GREAT CONTRIBUTION TRADE UNIONISM HAS MADE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ITS SUPPORT OF THE DESTROURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY. HE NOTED THE HIATUS OF FREE TRADE UNIONISM DURING THE 1960'S WHEN AHMED BEN SALAH WAS IN POWER AND SAID THAT SINCE 1970, WHEN HE RETURNED TO THE HEAD OF THE UGTT, THE WORKERS HAVE BENEFITED ENORMOUSLY FROM A POLICY OF COOPERATION AND MUTUAL RESPECT WITH THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. HE GAVE PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA FULL CREDIT FOR THIS POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

3. HEDI NOURIA'S SPEECH RECOUNTED ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF POLICIES FOLLOWED BY GOT SINCE 1970 AND SAID THAT FREE COOPERATION OF ALL ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT EFFORT HAS BEEN KEY TO SUCCESS. HE SAID TUNISIA HAS REJECTED COERCION AND THE SUPREMACY OF ONE GROUP OVER ANOTHER (WHETHER IT BE THE HEGEMONY OF CAPITAL OR THE TYRANNY OF ONE CLASS) AND HAS OPTED INSTEAD FOR THE RIGHT OF MAN TO LIBERTY, DIGNITY AND PROGRESS. NOURIA CALLED THE SOCIAL COMPACT SIGNED LAST JANUARY, "PROMISING FIVE YEARS OF SOCIAL PEACE," THE EPITOME OF THIS POLICY AND PRAISED HABIB AQHOUR FOR THE ROLE HE HAS PLAYED SUPPORTING THE COMPACT.

4. NUMEROUS OTHER SPEECHES FOLLOWED. NOTABLY, THE FARMER'S UNION PRESIDENT MOHAMED GHEDIRA AND THE BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL UNION PRESIDENT FERJANI BELHAJ AMMAR PRAISED THE UGTT'S ROLE IN SOCIETY AND EXPRESSED THEIR

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ORGANIZATIONS' SUPPORT FOR THE GOALS OF THE SOCIAL COMPACT TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY. ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL BLANCHARD PRAISED UGTT FOR ITS CONSTRUCTIVE WORK AT ILO AND SPOKE AT LENGTH ABOUT EMPLOYMENT CREATION GOALS SET AT THE WORLD EMPLOYMENT CONFERENCE IN 1976.

5. LAST SPEAKER OF THE OPENING SESSION WAS AFL-CIO REPRESENTATIVE IRVING BROWN. SPEAKING AS AN "OLD FRIEND" OF TUNISIA AND THE UGTT, BROWN REVIEWED HISTORY OF AFL-CIO"UGTT RELATIONS. HE ALSO TOOK EXCEPTION TO A STATEMENT MADE IN UGTT PAMPHLET PREPARED FOR THE CONGRESS THAT DESCRIBED

CHOUR'S WORK ON BEHALF OF PALESTINIAN CAUSE. PAMPHLET SAID THAT "JEWISH PERSONALITIES MANIPULATE TRADE UNIONS IN AMERICA, FRANCE, BELGIUM AND HOLLAND." BROWN SAID STATEMENT WAS FALSE AND IGNORED FACT THAT TRADE UNIONS IN THE U.S. ARE FREE AND NOT MANIPULATED BY ANYONE OTHER THAN THEIR OWN MEMBERSHIP. BROWN ALSO MADE STRONG DEFENSE OF HUMAN AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND SAID THAT FREEDOM

LIVING PEOPLE CANNOT DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOME COUNTRIES WHILE IGNORING VIOLATIONS ELSEWHERE. HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BE DEFENDED EVERYWHERE, BROWN SAID. THE UGTT DELEGATES RECEIVED BROWN WELL BUT GAVE HIS REMARKS ON HUMAN RIGHTS ESPECIALLY ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE.

6. UGTT CONGRESS IS NOW IN ITS SECOND DAY BUT HAS YET TO BEGIN CONSIDERATION OF ITS BUSINESS AS PARADE OF FOREIGN GUESTS CONTINUE TO MAKE SPEECHES. TUNISIAN MEDIA HAS GIVEN CONGRESS GOOD COVERAGE WITH TV CARRYING FULL SPEECHES BY NOUIRA AND ACHOUR. IRVING BROWN'S PRESENCE HAS BEEN NOTED, BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLICITY OF HIS DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
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